

DISTINCTIVE ECLECTIC CUISINE

BORDINOS REVISITED



& eats drinks REVIEW

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BORDINOS

310 West Dickson • Fayetteville, Arkansas

On any given Saturday evening, a long line of cars can be found slowly making its way up and down Fayetteville's infamous Dickson Street. Traffic is one of the many telltale signs of a small yet bustling city, but I try to be patient with my adopted hometown. In fact, I don't mind this bit of traveling congestion at all. Dickson Street isn't just a typical road or avenue; it's the heart and soul of our region — lined with the diverse virtues of what makes Fayetteville great, starting with a pristine church, followed by a strong-standing post office, an archetypical drug store, a French antique shop, mixed-use developments featuring new architecture with old integrity, a convenient liquor store, familiar galleries, a nationally recognized performing arts center, and a plethora of bars catering to a slew of patrons that include young Banana Republic types, nouveau hippies, university darlings, middle-aged professionals, and even the occasional drag queen taking the Dickson Street Theater stage on Sunday nights. A rich tapestry that I'm proud to call my own. And then there are the restaurants...

Eating establishments are abundant in our fair city—we've seen so many come and go—many of which were pretty damn good, but for whatever reason (be it poor management, the smoking ban, or personal tragedy) they just couldn't make it stick. Failure is a part of every business, and most successful restaurateurs have their own sob story which ultimately helped to create that success...and Dickson Street is chock full of just such heartbreaks. But for every tragedy, there is a success — and **Bordinos** stands above the rest.



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The virtues of this revered Fayetteville eatery are infinite, so it's practically impossible to pinpoint one reason for its success. The Italian restaurant's new location opened in August of last year, and owners Joe Fennel and Chef Chrissy Sanderson have never looked back. Joe has been an important fixture in Fayetteville for decades, and Sanderson, with her quiet urgency and eclectic culinary vision, have taken a good thing and made it even better. The old **Bordinos** had charm because of its intimacy; the new **Bordinos** has all the same charm, but also more space for serving more people. But the increase in size hasn't jeopardized the integrity one bit. In fact, the new and improved building boasts a larger, more efficient kitchen for Chef Chrissy, and a whole new ambient experience for the diner – the clever and sometimes haunting shadowboxes that line the walls of the main dining room are alone worth the trip.

Personally, I've always loved the positive vibe of **Bordinos**, not to mention the phenomenal food. I was a fan from the beginning – sitting at the highly stylized bar at the old location while working out my own personal process and ritual: a creamy, dark draft beer with the anchovy drenched Caesar salad, porous focaccia and sweet rosemary bread dipped in thick green extra virgin olive oil, a plate of pasta (typically the fettuccine with wild boar, but oftentimes the special pasta du jour) beside a glass of chunky cabernet or pinot noir, and then the tiramisu with either cognac, amaretto, or black coffee (and sometimes all three). My head would swim with the effects of drink and cuisine, but I remember every moment. And that's what the great ones allow: a snapshot of a point in time that will never be forgotten. How many of you can remember an important moment that took place in the dark, noisy confines of **Bordinos**? If you haven't, then make a reservation today.

Back to present day... I recently made my way through the tall doors of the eatery's new posh digs, then through the sleek vestibule to the hostess stand where I was immediately shown to my table in the east dining room. My dinner date and I had a late reservation of 10 p.m., but the place was packed with patrons at the bar and at almost every table. The bar is a thing of beauty complete with strategic track lighting featuring elegant fixtures that deliver muted burgundy illumination every two feet, all masterfully designed and choreographed by local artist Kathy Thompson. The front space is covered by a series of wide and high reaching picture windows looking out over Dickson Street – a stunning introduction to the restaurant.

We quickly ordered a round of aperitifs from the house cocktails menu – the *Ginger Peach Ice Pick* (\$6.50) for her, a pretty concoction of fresh ginger syrup, peach vodka, and iced tea; and the *Korbel of The Ball* (\$6.00) for me, an award-winning mixture of brandy, Peachtree schnapps, triple sec, and chilled Riesling (an interesting gem served straight up, and chilled, even though the brandy gave off a warm, rich sensation in the throat and stomach). We loved every sweet and delectable sip.

Our first food course of the evening was comprised of the *Baked Toscana Crab Cake* (\$7.95), a thick and sweet cake teeming with large white chunks of crab, served next to organic mixed greens, spritzed with sherry vinaigrette, and sauce rouille. My choice of the *Warm Potato Blini with Smoked Salmon* (\$8.50) was excellent – a delicate flower of salmon placed beside a traditional blini and served next to a slightly gamey goat cheese mousse and Greek olive tapenade. The salmon and sodium rich tapenade were set perfectly against subtle accents of lemon and basil.

Next, we decided to split a *Classic Caesar Salad* (\$5.25), crisp young romaine lettuce with homemade croutons and shaved Grana Padano Parmesan cheese, all barely coated in a thick, rich dressing. Undoubtedly, this has been and will probably always be the best Caesar Salad in Fayetteville – I would put it up against old man Cardini’s recipe anytime. (The standard “Caesar Salad” legend credits the creation of the recipe to an Italian immigrant, Caesar Cardini, who operated a restaurant in Tijuana, Mexico. According to the canonical version, told by Caesar’s daughter Rosa, he tossed the first “Caesar’s salad” on the evening of July 4, 1924.)

Our entrée selections for the evening were nothing short of fantastic. My date opted for the *Fettuccini with Ground Wild Boar Sausage* (\$14.50), comprised of thick ribbons of pasta tossed with sausage, earthy portobellini mushrooms, roma tomatoes and a flavorful white wine cream sauce, all topped with freshly grated Parmesan cheese. I’ve had an affinity for this pasta dish for years, and not even a new location or bright young chef could change its rich and organic flavor profile.

I chose the *Grilled Yellow Fin Tuna* (\$26.50), a generous filet served medium-rare with a tasty leek ragout, baby carrots and pecan lime butter. The fish was grilled perfectly, exposing a deep purple hue with each bite. And because I love a mealy starch with grilled tuna, I also requested a side of Chef Chrissy’s *Green Curry Risotto*, a perfect accompaniment to a perfectly prepared fish. A bottle of *Bridlewood, Syrah, California 2003* (\$29) was a nice mid-range wine that worked exceptionally well with both of our entrée choices.

For dessert we split an order of *Tiramisu* (\$6.50), a gorgeous stratification of ladyfingers soaked in espresso, creamy mascarpone cheese, and cocoa. This light, fluffy and classical Italian creation is definitely one of my favorite desserts, and **Bordinos** offers a truly



pure version – perfect with the slightly tart complement of raspberry coulis on the plate.

After dinner my wife and I walked back up Dickson Street, hand in hand, to our car – yet one more snapshot of my life captured brilliantly by the importance of great food and drink. Thanks for the memories, Joe. Bon Appétit! ■

